

2.3 Setting Your Compass

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Part I: Expectations

Expectations—we all have them! We all have an idea of what something may be like, and the military is no different. Being in (or working for) the military is an opportunity to participate in a proud tradition of service to our nation. It is also a challenge as members juggle their duties, personal and financial obligations, and the demands of an immediate or extended family. Being realistic about the privileges and hardships will help you be prepared for all that a military life has in store.

This topic addresses some of the expectations you may have about the military, and some of the expectations the military has of you. Read the following story, and think about how expectations can effect your feelings about an upcoming event or situation:

Lucy and Ricky:

Lucy and her husband, Ricky, just received orders for Ricky to go to recruiting school. They are both very excited about the assignment until Lucy remembers her friend Ethel telling her some stories about when Fred was a recruiter. Ethel described Fred working until midnight every night, including weekends, never being home for dinner, and Ethel having to cut the grass. Lucy had also spoken to some other friends who said that recruiter duty was great; They would receive extra money, Ricky wouldn't have to go to the field, he would be home every night for supper, and he would have plenty of time for all of Little Ricky's school activities during the day.

These two stories about being a recruiter are very different, and Lucy is confused about what to expect.

Lucy and Ricky Reactions:

What do you think Lucy's expectations of the new assignment will be? Positive? Negative? Perhaps a mixture of the two? Chances are, the assignment will be just that...a mixture of benefits and drawbacks.

We can't avoid having expectations, and it is natural to form opinions when we are uncertain of how something will be.

Some expectations are based on the descriptions of other families who have "been there, done that". Others are based on our personal background and experiences.

What do you expect from the Military?

Think about what you expect the military to do for you. Make a mental list of those expectations, or better yet, take a moment to write them down. List ALL your expectations --be honest, list every little benefit and support you expect the military to do for you.

A good way to determine if your expectations are "realistic" or "unrealistic" is to look at each expectation and ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this legal?
- Is there money for this?
- Can this be accomplished in the time available?
- Are there resources available for this?

If your answer is 'no' or 'not really', then that expectation is probably unrealistic. If your response is 'I don't know', you may have to do some research. Keep in mind that what may be unrealistic today, may become a reality tomorrow.

What does the Military Expect from You?

It is realistic for you to expect the military to take care of you in many ways, and to provide you with services and support. Now let's think about what the military expects of you. Of course you know that the military expects certain things from service members: to keep fit, to be well trained, and to be ready to accomplish the mission. But the military has expectations from family members and civilian employees as well. Using the space below make a list of what you think those expectations are. Then see how well your answers match with ours.

Military Expectations

The military knows that its members work best when their families are well cared for, and that things at home will run smoothly while they are away.

- Keep informed through trainings such as this RLDP training
- Organize your personal and financial affairs
- Promote family wellness – immunize your children, provide nutritious meals for your family, and develop healthy habits such as exercising.
- Help other families during times of stress or need
- Take advantage of military and community resources. A good place to start your search for resources is the USMEPCOM [Wellness and Readiness](#) website.
- Plan ahead for your relocation. Remember: moves are an important part of life in the military.

Being a Military Spouse

Being a military spouse has its rewards and challenges, and it is something to be proud of. "The Military Wife", an inspirational story written by an unknown author, perhaps best portrays all the joys, challenges and uniqueness of being a military wife. The story is a

little out-of-date, since we have increasing numbers of military “husbands” these days, but the sentiment is the same for any military spouse.

Story: “The Military Wife”

The good Lord was creating a model for military wives and was into His sixth day of overtime when an angel appeared. She said, 'Lord, you seem to be having a lot of trouble with this one. What's the matter with the standard model?'

The Lord replied, 'Have you seen the specs on this order? She has to be completely independent, possess the qualities of both father and mother, be a perfect hostess to four or forty with an hour's notice, run on black coffee, handle every emergency imaginable without a manual, be able to carry on cheerfully, even if she's pregnant and has the flu, and she must be willing to move 10 times in 17 years. And oh, yes, she must have six pairs of hands.'

The angel shook her head. "Six pairs of hands? No way."

The Lord continued, 'Don't worry, we will make other military wives to help her. And we will give her an unusually strong heart so it can swell with pride in her husband's achievements, sustain the pain of separations, beat soundly when it's over-worked and tired, and be large enough to say, 'I understand,' when she doesn't, and say 'I love you,' regardless.'

The angel circled the model of the military wife, looked at it closely and sighed, 'It looks fine, but it's too soft.'

'She might look soft,' replied the Lord, 'but she has the strength of a lion. You would not believe what she can endure.'

Finally, the angel bent over and ran her finger across the cheek of the Lord's creation. 'There's a leak,' she announced. 'Something is wrong with the construction. I am not surprised that it has cracked. You are trying to put too much into this model.'

The Lord appeared offended at the angel's lack of confidence. "What you see is not a leak," he said. "It's a tear."

"A tear? What is it there for?" asked the angel.

The Lord replied, 'It's for joy, sadness, pain, disappointment, loneliness, pride, and a dedication to all the values that she and her husband hold dear.'

'You are a genius!' exclaimed the angel.

The Lord looked puzzled and replied, 'I didn't put it there.'

Author Unknown

‘The Military Wife’ pertains to the military family whether in a dual-military family, single parents, male spouses, or civilian families. But though military families come in many different forms, all military family members share common characteristics: they must be strong, inventive, brave, and self-sufficient, and they must be up to the challenges of military life. In return, the military family members enjoy a unique sense of pride in soldier and country, and they have the knowledge that they are part of the select, close-knit group that is the USMEPCOM team.

Conclusion

In conclusion, keep in mind the following:

- Increasing one's knowledge of the military and USMEPCOM's mission helps to keep expectations realistic.
- The mission can affect both the soldier or civilian employee AND family members.
- Military customs, traditions, and protocol influence expectations.
- For service members, the military is a profession or a career.

Exercise

Decide whether the following are realistic or unrealistic expectations you have about the military:

The military should provide:

1. Totally free medical and dental care for all family members
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

2. Free childcare available 24 hours a day
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

3. A well stocked library on every military installation
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

4. Safe, non-hazardous, adequate housing
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

5. Excellent educational opportunities for children
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

6. Time off for the sponsor every weekend and holiday
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

7. A workplace free of sexual and racial harassment
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

8. Job security
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

9. Guaranteed employment for military spouses
____ *Realistic* ____ *Unrealistic*

Exercise Answers:

1. **Unrealistic.** This is unrealistic because it is too costly. If the military provided free medical and dental care to all family members, including parents, siblings, grandparents, the costs would be astronomical! However, military families do have low rates and deductibles for health care, and Active duty families are insured for care in any emergency.

2. **Unrealistic.** Free childcare 24 hours a day would certainly be a nice benefit, but it is unrealistic to expect the military to offer this. It would simply be too costly and difficult to implement such a program.

3. **Realistic.** Yes - this is a realistic expectation, and is in fact one of the benefits of living on or near post. For families living off post, please research your community libraries. Many libraries are equipped with computers and Internet access, so these are great place to do WWW research and to take online classes.

4. **Realistic.** This is one of the primary, basic responsibilities that the military has towards its service members and their families. It is definitely realistic for you to expect. Obviously for USMEPCOM personnel this may vary depending on your location. This is one of the reasons it is so important to research your new location before relocation.

5. **Realistic.** The military takes its responsibility to educate children of soldiers very seriously. For USMEPCOM families, educational opportunities will vary by every location and state education system. It is important for parents to communicate with schools if there are any concerns. Again, this is most important to consider during the relocation process. Check with your sponsor at your next duty assignment for assistance.

6. **Unrealistic.** It would be unrealistic to expect the sponsor to be home every weekend and holiday. The military never takes a holiday from protecting the nation, and service members serve their country by being ready to work when called upon: whether it be on a holiday, on weekends, late at night or early in the morning.

7. **Realistic.** A workplace free of sexual and racial harassment is definitely a realistic expectation. By law, all organizations in the U.S. should strive towards this, and the military takes this responsibility very seriously.

8. **Realistic.** Service members can certainly expect job security from the military. Many industries go through periods of instability and have to lay off workers, but the military is not dependent on a fluctuating economy –it exists to provide peace, security and defense of our nation. Therefore, a job for the military is one of the most secure jobs to have.

9. **Unrealistic.** Expecting guaranteed employment for military spouses is unrealistic. After all, many spouses do not work, or they have jobs in the civilian community. But there are many opportunities for employment within the military system.

Part II: Impact on Family Life

You may have heard the Army joke that has been made about military life: *'If the Army had wanted you to have a wife, they would have issued you one.'* There are other variations of this theme for each branch of service. Well, times have changed! Today, the military welcomes spouses and families. But though this quote is out of date, the military lifestyle remains unique, and the military mission can still profoundly affect the family. Families have an impact on the military's mission too, both positive and negative.

The Military Role and Mission

The mission's impact on family life will change over a service member's or civilian employee's career and will be greatly influenced by a number of factors such as the type of mission and the mission's location and its relationship to higher headquarters missions.

As a service member or civilian employee gains in rank and responsibility, the military's total, global mission has an increasing effect on family life. As a result, you may be called upon to hold the family together because that mission requires another family member's full attention. Therefore, the quality of life for military families will depend upon individual families' resiliency throughout their service members' or civilian employees' careers.

Seven Traits of Military Families

What have you noticed about military family members who seem to take it all in stride? They all possess the following traits:

- Patriotic
- Adaptable
- Involved and community oriented
- Possess a keen sense of humor
- Have realistic expectations
- Resourceful
- Celebrate adversity

Patriotic: The military family has a strong sense of patriotism and love of country, realizing that the welfare of the country and its citizens is the primary mission.

Adaptable: The military family is adaptable. The challenges of mobility, uncertainty, and separation force families to adapt to new cultures, friends, and support systems, and to deal with both positive and negative emotions.

Involved and Community Oriented: The military family gets involved in the community at all levels (neighborhood, unit, and city/installation), and they influence others to do likewise.

Possess a Keen Sense of Humor: It is often said, 'Laughter is the Best Medicine', and military families use humor to carry them through a wide range of emotions. It helps to find optimism in negative situations-sometimes the humor comes much later.

Have Realistic Expectations: What the military will do for you has changed over the years - as has what the military expects of family members. Fifty years ago, spouses did not get an allotment, and even longer ago than that, there was no life insurance for service members. Family members were expected to take in stride the hardships and challenges presented in military living. Today, you are enjoying the best quality of life the American military has ever known. Some families think the military 'should' take care of their every need during family separations, but realistic families do not expect this. They understand it is the responsibility of the military to provide the resources and the skills that empower the family members to take care of themselves. The byword of the military family is readiness. However, the military does provide the resources to assist the family while fostering this independence. This way, the military, service members, civilian employees and family members can achieve both personal and organizational readiness.

Resourceful: The military family learns how to 'make do', especially while involved in a permanent change of station move, serving a tour in a foreign country, or enduring the loneliness of family separation.

Celebrate Adversity: Celebrating adversity means thriving on challenges, meeting hardship with a smile and rejoicing in change. Military families say they have to...why else would they love the military life?

Conclusion

Recent research on families shows that over 85 percent of spouses enjoy the military lifestyle and encourage their husbands and wives to stay in the military. They enjoy it even though service members and civilian employees spend long hours planning, preparing, and training to defend our nation. This means that the service member or civilian employee will often be away during 'family time'. But the successful military family understands and embraces the challenge. Take a minute to reflect on some experiences that resulted from a family member being away, or busy with the mission, during family time. How were you able to cope? Do you possess the seven traits?

Exercise

Which of the following are among the Seven Traits of a Military Family?

1. Patriotic?

___ True ___ False

2. Always ready to Entertain?

___ True ___ False

3. Employable?

___ True ___ False

4. Possess a keen sense of humor?

___ True ___ False

5. Have realistic expectations?

___ True ___ False

6. Resourceful?

___ True ___ False

7. Born in the USA?

___ True ___ False

8. Involved and Community oriented?

___ True ___ False

9. Adaptable?

___ True ___ False

10. Welcoming?

___ True ___ False

11. Fun-Loving?

___ True ___ False

12. Celebrate Adversity?

___ True ___ False

Answers:

1) True, 2) False, 3) False, 4) True, 5) True, 6) True, 7) False, 8) True, 9) True, 10) False, 11) False, 12) True

Resource:

For more information, visit the following sites:

- [Independent Wife Magazine](#) is an online magazine dedicated to providing information for military wives on the move.

DOT.COM DISCLAIMER: The commercial websites listed in this module is for informational purposes only. Other sites with similar information are available and may prove equally useful.

